

THE SPIRITUAL ISSUES OF THE WAR

This bulletin is published for readers at home and abroad by the Religions Division of the Ministry of Information, London, to elucidate the spiritual issues at stake in the war, and to provide information concerning the British Churches in wartime, as well as their contribution to post-war reconstruction.

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CHRISTIAN AID FOR REFUGEES IN FRANCE

We have extracted the following details from a brief report issued by the Ecumenical Committee for the Assistance of Refugees:

"In spite of the departure of large numbers of foreigners who have been sent to work in Germany, the continued deportations of Jews to Poland and the flight of thousands to Switzerland, the number of refugees requiring assistance from the French Protestant relief organisations increases steadily. Foreigners who up to the present had independent financial means are now forced to apply for assistance. The Jewish and American committees are now in hiding in order to escape deportation and are therefore unable to support themselves. Jews who formerly lived in the south-eastern zone of France and enjoyed the special protection of the Italians had to flee inland when the Italians retreated before the Germans, and there they lead a difficult and expensive life in hiding. Then there is the reorganisation of the former large camps into a number of small refugee centres, each giving shelter to about 200 or 300 people, a task inspired to a large extent by the Protestant relief organisations. In addition, old people have been accommodated in French homes for the aged. This system of work calls for a considerably larger number of assistants, but it improves efficiency, insures sufficient nourishment and is preferable for reasons of security. The Refugee Service of the French Protestant Youth Organisation maintains eleven of these camp-homes and employs 35 assistants. It runs three Homes for refugees. That situated in Le Cambon accommodates 110 refugees. Two smaller Homes have been set up in other counties, each accommodating 20 people. Mention should be made of the enthusiastic help given by the Protestant

congregations which facilitates the organisation of the Homes and the nourishment of the guests. It costs approximately 25 Swiss francs per month to maintain one refugee in such a home.

"The following extracts from letters written by a nineteen-year-old French assistant in a Swiss refugee camp give a clear picture of the unselfish help given and the great need. The letters were written in the winter of 1942/43.

"17th December.—I will give you a short account of what happened yesterday. From 9 till 11 a.m. I walked through the buildings. Three little boys had their faces covered with pimples because of under-nourishment, and I rubbed yellow ointment on them. I found an Englishman, a Protestant, in bed completely naked because he had sold all his clothes with the exception of a pair of trousers, which were full of holes, for bread. He is terribly emaciated, covered with boils and devoured by lice. He has no shoes, is too weak even to fetch his food, and the others are not allowed to take it to him because he is unable to produce a medical certificate stating that he is unable to get up. I gave him a shirt, a coat and biscuits, but that won't prevent his dying this winter, for he is lost. Then I found another sick woman, covered with lice. I took her clothes to be disinfected and gave her two francs to have her hair cut. Then I was with a Spaniard during his last moments—he clung to my hand as if he were holding on to life—and then he was dead. I took books from the home to the infirmary. There I write letters to the families of patients who are too weak to write themselves; I make a note of the most urgent cases, where I can help with cotton-wool, ointment or medicaments. I talk to

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each patient for about five minutes—this is very important. I try to settle the many little quarrels that arise as fairly as possible.’

“The helpers of the Refugee Service of the Protestant Youth Organisation are certainly true Witnesses of the Gospel, and their message is listened to in the camps. On December 20th Monique writes: ‘The echo of my own sermons always dazes me. I compare the ordinary places of worship, from which people go home comfortably with peaceful, contented and drowsy minds—and here you can see people, who have nothing else at all, literally hanging on to every word they hear! One day a facetious friend of mine told me that my sermons were original. I replied with a smile: “Yes, that is the New Church.” (I have often spoken to him about Barth and all the others.) He took that very seriously, and now whenever I say anything he thinks that my opinion is that of “the New Church.”’

“Christmas in the camp means a terrific amount of work and gives an enormous amount of pleasure. During Holy Night, when cakes were baked for 700 people, they invited some Spaniards (of whom Monique is particularly fond) to a fraternal banquet. ‘Three lame men, one man with only one arm, one deaf mute, one man with half his skull made of duraluminium, a number of Spanish women and myself enjoyed a royal banquet consisting of potatoes and tripe eaten round a kitchen table. And we broke bread together in true Communion on the eve of Christmas. There is so much happiness inside me that even if I radiated it to others for my whole life, it would still not be exhausted.’

“This refugee service is being carried out at the present time in conditions of constant mortal danger. Anyone who takes in homeless Jews and ‘political criminals’ in the occupied countries risks his life. That God makes it possible for this service to be carried out in spite of everything and that He blesses it so abundantly is a miracle of His grace.

“Besides the Protestant Relief Service, the French Protestant Church also has a special organisation concerned with spiritual ministrations to foreigners and individuals affected by the dispersal of populations. Here, too, the number of people seeking assistance grows steadily. An enormous amount of correspondence on both personal and spiritual matters is carried on, and an eagerly awaited lending library makes its rounds; about 400 particularly needy cases receive regular support. A great number of French

priests help the leader of the Spiritual Service like brothers. The refugees have, in fact, proved to be a heaven-sent gift to the Reformed Church of France—they receive a great deal, but they give even more.

“Although French friends of the movement gladly and of their own free will risk everything and many members of the congregation shares their little all with the homeless, this work by which thousands benefit either directly or indirectly is mainly dependent on donations, an amount of 12,500 Swiss francs per month being required. The budget up to January, 1944, could only be assured by raising loans in Switzerland. We must pay off these debts and carry on the relief work yet further. In spite of all the burdens already imposed upon Switzerland, we therefore issue this heartfelt appeal: ‘Do not tire of helping the courageous Witnesses of the love of Christ and our unfortunate brethren in France.’”

THOSE ABOUT TO DIE—MOVING NEWS FROM OCCUPIED LANDS

The following moving article appeared in the Swiss paper *Semteur Vaudois*, on December 4th, 1943:

“This morning my paper announced the execution of 17 men in Belgium, 19 in France, and others in Norway, Holland and elsewhere. Every day in Europe men are shot for having fulfilled their duty as patriots. Everywhere reprisals, vengeance, the bloody seeds of hate—of worse than hatreds, as one man of an occupied country put it—‘the hate which knows how to wait.’

“I let my paper fall. I see these men who, in the early morning, between naked and chilly walls, live alone, without friends. They have just passed a night of agony. They have thought of their family, their home, their country. They take their last steps between the cell and the grave. They go to die resigned or revolting or desperate.

“The names of these men are unknown. They are alone, quite alone. And perhaps some of them are asking themselves bitterly whether they are not dying in vain. . . .

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“In Holland an appeal for prayer for the condemned has been distributed at church doors and read from many pulpits.

“Read this document and pray. . . .

“We are addressing an urgent request to you. Perhaps many of you are ignorant of the fact that the occupying authorities have to-day condemned to death a large number of Dutchmen. These men in the vigour of

their strength suddenly find themselves before the gates of eternity.

"We know that many of them are already prepared and spiritually ready to meet their Saviour next week; they are spending their last days in prayer in their cells.

"There are others for whom eternity is a dark passage, and only that with nothing beyond. They do not yet know the person of Christ, who said in blessing "Come unto me all ye that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

"In agreement with most of those condemned to death, some young Christians have decided to ask you to kneel down with them before God on Tuesday, 12th October, between 7 and 8 o'clock in the morning, they in their cells, you in your room, your kitchen, in the hotel, in your ship's cabin, wherever you are—in order to ask God to give light and strength, rest and interior peace to those who are soon to enter eternity.

"They need your help. They need your prayers. They have a right to them.

"They have acted according to their conscience as Dutchmen. They are ready to accept the consequences.

"Let us pray God that in His grace He will be especially close to them. They count on the support of your prayers.

"May God comfort those who are left in mourning. Remember them, too, in your prayers.

"May God show His mercy to our country so cruelly tried."

EVENTS IN NORWAY

A report in *Svenska Dagbladet* of December 19th provided a short summary of the present situation of interned clergymen in Norway. "21 Norwegian clergymen are interned, three of whom—Gunnval Havig, Hallvard Sovde and Sophus Jorgensen—are in Germany.

"Eivind Berggrav is still in a cottage in Asker, while O. Hallesby, Joh. Wisloff, Ludvig Hope, Arne Thu, Hans Finstad, Johs. Smith, J. O. Rodland, O. S. Fodnes, Finn Konow, Agnar Sandvik, K. Arvold, Knutsen Oi and Kristian Schjelderup are interned in various concentration camps in Norway.

"Several more Norwegian clergymen have been interned for longer or shorter periods."

More Threats

Other news, quoted in *Aftontidningen*, seems to indicate further action against faithful church leaders in Norway.

"Kvasnes, the quisling Bishop of Stavanger, has endeavoured to induce the State

Police to intern the Norwegian bishops—which would undoubtedly be most effective, and would render them harmless till they accept the new régime.' Kvasnes says the work of the new bishops is complicated by the presence of the old bishops.

"So far only Bishops Hille and Krohn-Hansen have been expelled from their homes, but Kvasnes recommends this procedure for all former bishops if the Chief of the State Police does not think they should be interned.

"Skancke, the Minister for Ecclesiastical Affairs, has written to Marthinsen, Chief of the State Police, explaining Kvasnes' view and requesting a statement on the matter."

DENMARK—THE TASK OF THE MINISTRY

In past numbers *Spiritual Issues* has from time to time given evidence of the important part which is being played by the Church in the national life of Denmark. *Kristeligt Dagblad* (December 22nd) provides information showing the spirit in which the Danish Church is facing present problems.

The Danish Lutheran Bishop, Dr. H. Fuglsang-Damgaard, on December 22nd ordained seven priests in the cathedral of Copenhagen. On this occasion he gave an address in which he said:

"I remind you to-day of the word of the Apostle in the Epistle to the Hebrews, chapter x, 35-36: 'Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.'

"The Apostle wrote these words when great evils were assailing the faithful. They were persecuted and thrown into prison, but they held fast, they conducted themselves in a way becoming to a Christian community.

"We have a duty to thank God for having spared and preserved us from misery up to the present, but when we as Christians speak of the Church, we do not think only of our own Church, our eyes also look beyond our frontiers to the great Church, Holy and Catholic, and we see its sufferings. Indeed, we need great courage for the good of our own people. This people is faced by many questions which also concern us. The priest must place himself in the midst of his people, he must be one with the people, and must partake of their fortune and their sufferings.

"We must have courage and we must also exhort others not to be discouraged. Be strong, be courageous in accepting responsibility, be convinced that the Church is the only power in the world which can show us

the face of true courage. Do not allow yourselves to be influenced by vain words which proclaim that the days of the Church are numbered and that nothing remains but ruins. Your ordination is a grace of perseverance which ought to provide you with the strength to show resistance in the days of temptation; your faithful are praying for you that you may preserve your strength and the spirit of wisdom."

Nazism v. the Church

From Sweden *Svenska Morgonbladet* provides this evidence that Danish churchmen understand the spiritual nature of their present conflict:

The illegal newspaper, *The Free Dane*, in a special Christmas number, published a sermon by Pastor Paul Borchenius of the parish of Randers, which he wrote before leaving Denmark.

The Pastor says that a crown was placed on the tomb of one of the heroes of the secret army of Denmark with the inscription, "Have no fear of the powers of darkness." That is the order of the day in the fight of Denmark in our time.

"Nazism is not only a new political and cultural order, it is a new religion, an anti-Christian religion which provides a parallel to the fight of the first Christians against the tyranny of Rome and the worship of the Emperor. Now, as at the beginning of Christianity, earthly powers wish to reign in the souls and interior lives of men as well as in their public life. That was the cause of the fight against an earthly power which controlled all outward means of violence and an interior and invisible force.

"In the long run Christianity, without arms, by its spiritual strength wins the victory over the paganism of the State, which worships violence and worships itself. This fight is essential in order to assure us of peace, and that is why we can celebrate Christmas in spite of sad and bitter times.

"For 1,000 years Denmark has known no such desire for the light of Christmas as it has to-day. Our bells will sound the victory of the power of the invisible, of peace gained by struggle and of a better future rising from the ruins."

BISHOP OF COVENTRY ON BIG BEN MINUTE

In the course of a recent broadcast on the Big Ben Minute, the Bishop of Coventry said:

"At nine o'clock on the B.B.C. every evening Big Ben sounds in every home in the country and a minute's silence follows. This was started in the days of our greatest need in history, Dunkirk days, to call us all together as a nation to turn to God. And God's answering mercies we remember.

"But now the end is in sight. Soon we are going to face what we believe to be the last moment of these four years. Where can you and I, sitting at home, give *our* help?

"Think of this. Our thoughts can travel, and do travel, on unseen waves, and it's possible for us to surround those we are thinking of with a kind of barrage of anxious thoughts, and so hurt and damage them, or, alternatively, if we can learn to pray, to support them with trust and faith.

"Think—if you were away fighting and you knew just at that precise moment at nine o'clock each day that those you love were praying for you and you could rely on it. Think, too, of how we can help each other in our own homes at one moment, an unseen fellowship sending out help together.

"Think quietly through the strokes of the bell. There is One behind us all. Then there is a silence. Again listen. The essence of it is to listen quietly with a quiet mind. God does speak, not in words, but in different ways to the heart, to each his own way.

"Remember others at prayer and listening with you and put it all into God's hands. The men and their cause and our cause, and the victory. Then as you go on to listen to the news, carry on that thought. You may hear of a general in command of combined operations. Think of all that depends on him. His need for a quiet mind and decision. Hold him up in your thoughts to God. You may hear of this division or that flung into desperate action. Hold them up as you listen. . . .

"There are people in enemy countries, children, women and aged, caught up with us in this net of suffering. Remember them with us all.

"Open that circle round you and draw into it the anxious and the waiting and the dying and the hospital beds. And Europe waiting for a release.

"Offer yourself. Ask for a quiet mind to carry on your own work. And ask that through us all and to us all God's strength may be with us. And that Christ's healing hand, with the marks of His giving and suffering may be laid on us all."